

**Sheffield & District
Orchid Society
Newsletter
November 2013**



**November Plant of the Month
*Zootrophion argus***

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Business

The AGM is the next event on our calendar, and a very important date. You should all have the details with the last newsletter. There was just 1 small mistake which was that the date on the notice of AGM stated 15th December, but it is definitely on the 8th. The audited accounts are included with this newsletter.

Please note that any members still holding trophies must return them on the day of the meeting.

Any members who haven't renewed their subs should do so ASAP. The Treasurer would like to remind members who pay by standing order should check their bank statements to ensure they are paying at the new rate (£15), and amend their Standing Order if not. Also, if you have never completed a gift aid form then please contact Norman for one as we are able to reclaim a reasonable sum back from the Revenue annually.

We have a supply of the new BOC Yearbook now that the golden guide seems to be defunct. This is produced by the BOC rather than BOGA, and there is always a frequently updated online version available.

A question was asked of the very knowledgeable Malcolm Perry at the end of his lecture if he knew of a replacement for Physan now that it was no longer available. He recommends a product called Selgiene - Ultra Bactericidal Cleaner, manufactured by Selden. It is designed for hospitals and janitorial use. One website lists it as a Virucidal cleaner - which is also worth knowing. It comes in 5L bottles or 750ml sprays.

The Table Show

Silvia volunteered for this month's table show, and started with *Habenaria rhodocheila* that was just about 3-4" tall with 3 growths and orange flowers that just weren't quite open yet. This is a terrestrial plant that needs a rest. At the same height was *Pths. palliolata* - a plant whose flowers don't fully open (they look a bit like a frog's mouth - Ed). This cool growing species had lots of pale pink flowers and buds that come out of the leaves. Also on the small side was *Zootrophion argus* 'Eva May' with 3 mottled flowers that don't open. Another cool growing plant, the flowers are almost bigger than the leaves. It was judged to be the Plant of the Month (see front cover). *Masd. Misty* (Gold Dust x *ionorcharis*) was still a young plant with just a single decent sized orange flower. *Masd. veitchiana* was a well flowered plant with tall orange flowers. *Bulbophyllum pteroglossum* is a native of northern Thailand and was well grown on a bark slab and had quite a lot of small brown speckled flowers. *Bulb. appendiculatum* is from a different section (formerly *Cirrhopetalum*) and had an extended lip. This slightly purplish species is from north of the Nilgiri hills.

Vanda coerulea 'Blue' was a well grown plant (see back cover) with 2 spikes of tessellated blue flowers that create a good effect. *V. sanderiana* x *Booncho* x *tavesuksa* was a large plant with large deep pink flowers with purple halves - very pleasant. *Phal. Happy Girl* looked well with white flowers and a contrasting pink lip. *Phal. equestris* was a small flowered species with 2 short spikes of small pink flowers.

Cattleya Porcia had a large cluster of 11 pink flowers (see back cover). This intermediate plant can grow into a huge specimen. *Epicanthe* (Ett.) *Don Herman* is a *Cattleya* with smallish yellow flowers with tiny red

blotches. *C. coccinea* var. *cernua* (formerly *Sophronitis*) was a small plant with tiny orange flowers. *Barkeria scandens* is an unusual plant that is grown high up in a basket where it is watered every day. It has a tall spike of smallish deep pink flowers.

Rst (*Oncidium*) *Vexativum* is a primary hybrid with almost triangular yellow, brown and white flowers. This was a good form. *Zelenkocidium* (*Oncidium*) *Calico Gem* had very nice mottled pink flowers.

In the slippers it seems that the species on show are all getting smaller. *Paph. braemi* is a variety of *tonsum* from Vietnam. *coccinuem* is a variety of *barbigerum*. *Charlesworthii* is a good small pinkish plant, and *tranlienatum* was more of a specimen with unusual shaped flowers. *Phrag. besseae* looked well with 2 strong orange flowers - this was a plant that had come from the raffle 12 months ago. *Phrag. longifolium* var. *gracile* was good with plenty of leaf as you might expect with this species. The final plant was the very tall *Renanthera imschootiana* at almost 4', and a problem to transport around - sadly one of the spike's branches was damaged this way. The flowers are a deep red colour and certainly light up the room! **Thank you Silvia.**

November Plant of the Month

Zootrophion *argus*

This is one of only about twenty species in the genus and is native to Central and South America. Zootrophions have no pseudobulbs, the stem rising from a short rhizome.

It has the common name of The Thousand Eyed Orchid referring to Argus, a Greek mythological monster reputed to have 1000 eyes. I can only imagine that this could be because of the heavy, dense spotting on the flower.

This particular, fairly recently acquired, plant is actually a division of one which has been awarded both a Botanical Certificate and a Certificate of Cultural Commendation by the RHS Orchid Committee. It is grown cool i.e. minimum 50F overnight and, ideally, 60F daytime though this is extremely difficult to maintain in summer. It is grown with *Masdevallias* and *Pleurothallids* in a shady, humid position and is watered all year round, less so through winter during which no fertiliser is applied. **Brian Woodward**

Orchids of the Nilgiri Hills

Malcolm Perry

Malcolm is well known in the UK orchid scene, and is now semi retired - old habits die hard. As a professional he used to be the 'go to' man if you wanted something unusual or uncommon, especially within the species. He could generally source anything given time. He is now a hobbyist and adviser to various botanic gardens where his encyclopaedic knowledge is of great use.

One great benefit to growing orchids is to see them *in situ*, and he is widely travelled. One place not on his list was India - mainly down to health concerns, but this was changed by a chance meeting at one of the Peterborough shows where a discussion on Paph. *druryi* was ongoing. Joining in he found that the questioner was from a Tea plantation Family from the Nilgiri hills in southern India. To cut a long story short, after a while Malcolm had an invite to go and stay at the plantation, to go and search for orchids that he is interested in - particularly a small number of Coelogynes from this region that generally aren't in cultivation.

The southern uplands in India are the Ghats, generally divided into the western and eastern parts. This area is very tropical, and at sea level very hot. Up in the mountains despite the closeness to the equator it can be much cooler at times, and in winter can reach -6C at the peaks. The local tribe is the Toda who used to be nomadic buffalo herders, but now are settled. They are given free gas in the nature reserves to avoid them cutting down the trees. The buffalo provide dung for fertiliser. Monsoon rains will often isolate the villages and wash away roads and bridges.

When the Brits colonised India this area became a bolt hole when the cities became too hot. Up the middle slopes tea cultivation started as conditions were suitable. The land is dry during winter, and is mainly grassy, with small copses of evergreens known as sholas in the more sheltered valleys. Tea plants were imported, together with eucalyptus trees to create the summer shade. Coimbatore is the local centre, and the plantation Malcolm stayed at Korabundah is the highest at just under 9000' above sea level. Tea plantations are around 33% tea, 33% shola and 33% imported trees.

During March the environment is bone dry with clear blue sky. There are no insects about despite it being 50F at night and 70F during the day. This is pleasant for us brits, which is why it is there. The tea grown at this altitude is normally used in blends rather than being specific names. The local wildlife includes Bee Eaters and Flycatchers, lots of butterflies and the Nilgiri Langur which stands up to 5' tall with a 5' tail. These are classed as hooligans and a nuisance, but are now sadly becoming more scarce as pressure on the land grows. There are of course tigers and leopards around but less active during the day - they hunt the local ibex (Nilgiri Tahr) at night, and a few nasty snakes to avoid. The most dangerous animal however is the Indian buffalo that kills more humans than the predators put together.

The western Ghats support over 130 endemic orchid species, of which 123 are from the Nilgiri hills, so this is an important botanic area, including *Den. barbatum*, *macrostachyum* (similar to *aphyllum*), *ovatum*, and the small (obviously) *microbulbon*. In the lower hills *Rhyncostylis retusa* is found with its long pendant clusters of pink flowers, as well as *Bulbophyllum tramulum*. Lower still (and warmer) you find *Vanda tessalata* and the lovely small yellow flowered *V. testacea* as well as some natural hybrids. There are of course some terrestrials with the intriguing and rare yellow Paph. *druryi* (over 1000 miles from its nearest relative) and *Acanthephippium bicolor* is a short deciduous plant. *Catonia pendunculata* is a plant whose flowers imitate bees. *Pecteilis gigantea* has 4" white flowers. It should be noted that few local Indians have gardens, and that there are no Orchid nurseries in the region.

Coel. mossiae is found here on the trees, and flowers just after the monsoons. Closely related *Coel. nervosa* is found on the ridges, and this common plant is regularly cultivated. *Coel. odoratissima* is a highly scented white flower. These are difficult to find when not in flower as they have tended to colonise the imported *Grevillea* trees.

Aerides ringens is a plant that will grow in either full sun or in the shade (where it grows better) with its pendant cluster of tiny white flowers. *Eria* is a common genus that produces far less flashy flowers. *Oberonias* will also be found with their 12" leaves such as *brunoniana* & *verticillata*. *Seidenfadeniella rosea* is a striking plant with pink flowers and needle shaped leaves. At altitude *Clalanthe triplicata* will be found. This deciduous plant will start growing when frost is still around.

Bulbophyllums have some of the weirdest flowers in the entire orchid genus (being the oldest they have had longer to develop), and there are

several in the warmer lowlands. Bulb. *nilgherrense* (syn. *sterile*) is one with yellow flowers that smells awful - and consequently not in cultivation. NB The name *nilgherrense* and variants denotes plants from the Nilgiris. Bulb. *fuscopurpureum* is quite spectacular with a purple flower, whereas Bulb. *fimbriatum* is very frilly with a pale flower and it is a deciduous plant. Bulb. *aureum* is a pretty yellow flower. *Habenaria* (now *Platanthera*) *longicalcarata* is very showy.

The hills/mountains tend to rise up steeply in places (up to 7000') which causes the wind to rise and cloud to form creating the moist atmosphere at times and in some places. This creates the perfect environment for the elusive *Coel. mossiea* which was one of Malcolm's treats for the trip. Sadly the conditions and time constraints meant that it wasn't possible to find. *Coel. breviscapa* was found though - which is still a bit of a mystery being the missing 5th of this group of Indian *Coelogynes* - it is still under review/debate.

This was another tremendous lecture from Malcolm and following a few questions he was given a hearty round of applause.

Dates for your diary...

Monthly meetings at Ranmoor – 10am

Dec 8th AGM, followed by buffet

Jan 12th 2014 TBA

Other shows

Nov 30th BOGA Fayre, Arden School, Knowle, Solihull

Society website - www.sheffieldorchids.org



Above:- *Cattleya Porcia*

Below: - *Vanda coerulea* 'Blue'

